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ABSTRACT

Vocational training has traditionally been a part of the services provided to Indian people by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, but for many decades the training offered was inadequate and inappropriate and students completing programs were unemployable either on or off the reservation. In 1975 as Indian education began to move from federal control to Indian control, Indian people became more involved in the decisions that affected them and their children. However, even today Indian students do not receive adequate and proper academic and vocational counseling in federal or public schools. Girls in particular have been discouraged from going on to college and have instead been trained for menial jobs such as those with domestic, janitorial, or clerical duties. During this century a number of vocational training programs have greatly affected Indians, including the 1933 Indian Emergency Conservation Work Program, the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act, and the 1946 Navajo Special Education Program. Assimilation programs like the Labor Recruitment and Welfare Program and the Voluntary Relocation Program were not successful because they took people off the reservation and thrust them into trying to cope with a strange culture. Today, present vocational training opportunities include the Higher Education Assistance program, working scholarships, loans, Indian Health Service training, and numerous other programs sponsored by tribes, colleges or through state or federal agencies. (DS)

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Vocational Education for American Indians: Then and Now

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"What disturbs me is that the word 'qualified' only gets put in front of a member of a minority or an ethnic. The assumption seems to be that all whites are qualified. You never hear about anybody looking for a 'qualified white person.' ...It seems the word 'qualified' sort of dangles as an excuse for discriminating against minorities."

Frankie M. Freeman,
U.S. Civil Rights Commissioner

(Witt, 1974, p. 34)

Vocational Education for American Indians: Then and Now

There are over 835,000 American Indians, Aleuts, and Eskimos in the United States, and they are concentrated in sixteen states. Only about 30% of the Indian population live in urban areas, the remainder live in rural areas of varying degrees of isolation. Of the total population, approximately 40% are of school age (Allen, 1976, p. 19). There are 480 tribes in addition to the Eskimos and Aleuts; many northeastern tribes and others scattered throughout the country have either never been formally recognized by the federal government, or have been terminated and are therefore ineligible for the federal aid and services provided to recognized Indian people.

The United States Department of Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs has been responsible for providing these services to Indians for many years. Areas addressed by the government and BIA include natural resources legislation, schooling, health care, vocational and educational programs. It is the area of vocational training and programs that will be the focus of this paper.

Federal Vocational Programs: A Historical Look

In 1568 the first school for Indians was established in Havana, Cuba specifically for Florida Indians; it was established by the Society of Jesus. Later, in 1617 Moor's Charity School (Dartmouth College) was founded as a training school for the education of the youth of Indian tribes, English youth, and other young people. Other early attempts to provide education for Indian people were meager, and focused on "civilizing and Christianizing the savages." The federal government followed these early attempts at Indian education by religious factions, and by 1842, the number of federal Indian schools had reached 37. In 1860, the first federal reservation boarding school was established in Washington state on the Yakima Reservation. Five years later a Congressional committee recommended that off-reservation boarding schools be established, with an emphasis on agricultural training, thus signalling the beginning of federal vocational training for Indian people. $100,000 was appropriated in 1870 for the operation of federal industrial schools for Indian people. When the Carlisle Indian School was founded in 1879, its emphasis was on vocational training also. Unfortunately, the training offered at these schools and others was often inadequate and inappropriate for meeting the needs of Indian people (Szasz, 1974, p. 10).

Indian education (academic and vocational) continued along these lines until 1928 when the Meriam Report was published. This report looked closely and critically at the

condition of Indian education in America, and made severe comments. Two areas that came under fire were the attempts by the federal government to acculturate Indian people, and the non-applicability of the vocational training provided Indian people by the federal (BIA) schools. It was reported the the training offered was not geared to meet the job market needs, that trades taught were obsolete, and that the training programs discouraged graduates from returning to the reservation (Szaz, 1974, p. 24). The Meriam Report caused a great deal of furor when it first appeared, but was then forgotten until the 60's when further probes into Indian education were conducted.

In the 1930's W. Carson Ryan was Education Director of the BIA, and his thrust was toward practical vocational training for Indian students. He was perhaps one of the few bureaucrats who believed that Indian students should have more freedom of choice when it came to their own lives. Ryan was also concerned that vocational training be applicable and appropriate for reservation life, and wrote a directive to that end in an effort to improve vocational programs at non-reservation trade and vocational schools. He emphasized that vocational training should address the long-range economic goals and purposes of each reservation, and that schools needed to be flexible enough to adapt their programs to these goals (Szaz, 1974, p. 65).

When Hildegard Thompson became Director of the Branch of

Education in 1952, she worked to coordinate vocational training programs for terminated tribes. She also encouraged post high school education for Indian people, whether it be in college or vocational school. Sensitive to the technological developments of the time, she believed that Indian students must be trained to adapt to 20th century America, and focused her education programs on preparing students to be able to exist and function in a technological society (Szasz, 1974, p. 131).

Following her retirement in 1965, Indian education began to move from federal control to Indian control. Programs have continued with some modifications. As before, the major emphasis is on recognizing and addressing the needs of Indian people as they relate to academic and vocational education. The main difference is that with the advent of Indian control, Indian people are becoming involved in the decisions that affect them and their children, and the frame-of-reference has shifted from Anglo to Indian.

BIA Vocational Education: The Realities

Although the philosophy of the BIA may appear acceptable on paper, what actually occurred as a result of Bureau policy regarding vocational education was unacceptable. The inappropriateness of vocational programs has already been mentioned. However, this inappropriateness did not only extend to students learning skills that weren't applicable to the reservation needs, but also could be found in the

teaching of skills that were supposed to be useful off the reservation. Students were often taught on outmoded and obsolete equipment, they were taught skills that were not in demand, and they were often taught improperly so that they were unemployable on and off the reservation.

Girls were forced to take classes in "laundry," and very often classwork consisted of washing and ironing the headmaster's clothes (Collier, 1972, p. 54). Indian students were involved in work-training programs during the summers in order to become "civilized": they were supposedly paid, but the money either didn't exist, or was sent back to their school and kept by the staff (Collier, 1972, p. 54). Girls also received training in menial jobs such as domestic, clerical, janitorial.

These incidents are not confined to the early years of Indian vocational programs. As recently as the late 1960's BIA counselors were telling girls to forget about college, that thoughts of attending the university were irrational and unrealistic, and that the Bureau did not have money for that sort of thing (Collier, 1972, p. 55). This type of thinking and the inherent attitudes continue today. Indian students do not receive adequate and proper academic and vocational counseling in federal or public schools. Even though there has been a great deal of legislation passed and numerous programs developed, attitudes cannot be

legislated, and they can damage even the best of programs.

Vocational Legislation and Programs

Some of the very early appropriations for the training of Indian people have already been mentioned. However, there are additional pieces of legislation and vocational programs that have greatly affected Indians.

In 1933 the Indian Emergency Conservation Work Program (IECW), which dealt with land conservation and management, went into effect. This program offered Indian people the opportunity to receive training in those areas. During the life of the program (April 1933 - July 1942) over 85,000 Indian people received training and worked within the program (Szasz, 1974, p. 41).

The next year, 1934, the Indian Reorganization Act, an amended version of the Wheeler-Howard Bill, was put into effect. The education section of the Act provided that $250,000 be made available on an annual basis for Indian students who wanted special vocational or trade school training. The loan was to be applied to tuition and other expenses incurred through attendance at recognized vocational schools. Indian high school students as well as Indian college students were also eligible to receive monies under this act.

The Navajo Special Education Program began in 1946 and continued until the 1960's. This program was a result of the war years and the large population growth of the Navajo Tribe.

During its lifetime, the program educated over 4,300 overage Navajo students. The program had two main goals: to provide the opportunity for general learning about white culture and to provide specific vocational training to enable students to find jobs. The training provided was focused on urban living: not only because most job opportunities existed off the reservation, but because the amount of land on the reservation according to the 1868 allotment was meant to support only 7500, and the 1946 Navajo population was 59,000.

The program attempted to provide 10-12 years of schooling in five years. The first three years of the program dealt with basic skills mastery, and the final two years focused on vocational training and job placement (Szaz, 1974, p. 116).

In 1947 the federal government appropriated money for a Labor Recruitment and Welfare Program for the Navajo and Hopi Reservations. This program took Indian people off the reservation and placed them in Denver, Los Angeles, Phoenix, and Salt Lake City, where they were trained and employed.

The Labor Recruitment and Welfare Program was the basis for the National Program of Relocation Assistance which began in 1952 and expanded in 1957. In 1962 the "Voluntary Relocation Program" as it was then called, was renamed the "Employment Assistance Program." Bureau of Indian Affairs assistance sites included: Chicago, Cleveland, Dallas, Denver, Los Angeles, Oakland, San Jose, Tulsa, Oklahoma City, and Seattle (Bahr, 1972, p. 407).

According to a BIA Area office, the goals of the Employment Assistance Program include:

1. The development of employment opportunities for Indian people with some amount of skill who are unable to locate work.

2. Make available institutional training for all Indian boarding school and public school graduates who prefer not to or cannot go on to post high school education.

3. Provide on the job training for unskilled Indian people in order to meet the labor demands of increased industrialization on/near reservations.

4. Provide vocational counseling and guidance to unemployed or underemployed reservation Indians.

5. Participate in community development programs and provide work orientation and motivation (Bahr, 1972, p. 408).

The Relocation Program had very serious effects on Indian people. It, like the Navajo Special Education Program and the Labor Recruitment and Welfare Program, was the result of the pro-assimilation philosophy existent in Congress and the country at the time. These programs were essentially saying to Indian people, "you must either assimilate, and conform to the Anglo way, and move hundreds of miles from the reservation, or stay and be satisfied living at substandard levels" (Bahr, 1972, p. 408).

Another result of the Relocation Program was, according to Clarence Pickernell, Quinalt, a whiplash reaction: Indian people began to realize how much they needed the depth and

strength of their Indian culture. Indians who relocated to the city began to lose touch with their culture, but at the same time, they did not blend in with the non-Indian culture. The result was a renewed search for their Indian identity (Szaz, 1974, p. 165).

For many Indian people involved in relocation programs the strain of staying in the city was not only painful, but debilitating. The anomie that resulted from being uprooted and thrust into a strange society and culture was tremendous. Large numbers of Indians returned to the reservation rather than remain in the urban centers because urban slum conditions where they ended up were even worse than the reservation where at least they had the support of their own people around them (Collier, 1972, p. 55).

In 1956, Congress expanded the Adult Vocational and Educational Training Program which affected adult Indians (18-35) living on or near reservations who were seeking vocational training. This expansion was an attempt to strengthen the relocation programs already in existence. According to the BIA they helped place 45,400 adult Indians in jobs on or near reservations between 1956 and 1966 under a variety of relocation programs (Szaz, 1974, p. 137).

The Economic Opportunity Act which was passed in 1964 provided for new programs for Indian children, and for older students and adults. Head Start was established for young children, and for other eligible Indian people, Upward Bound,

Job Corps, Vista, and the Indian Community Action Program (Thompson, 1978, p. 173).

Present Vocational Education Availabilities

Indian people continue to suffer from high unemployment rates; these can reach up to 90% umemployment on some reservations in the winter (Witt, 1974, p. 30). Federal employment for Indian women usually means clerical positions with the BIA, or unskilled positions with Indian Health Service. These positions usually have very low GSA ratings and the accompanying low pay (Witt, 1974, p. 32).

However, with the vocational training opportunities that are beginning to be offered Indian people it is hoped that the employment situation will change. The following are some additional vocational and professional education opportunities available to Indian people through the Bureau and other agencies:

1. Higher Education Assistance Program: annual scholarships and grants are available to Indian students to assist them in attending institutions of higher learning. This program is open to undergraduates, veterans, married students, graduate students, summer school students, part time students, private college students, physically handicapped students, and ex-offenders and inmates.
2. Working scholarships: room and board are exchanged for 14 hours of work per week by the student. These are available at a few BIA boarding school near colleges.

3. Loans: these are very limited and to be offered only if the student has no other means of financing school. Emphasis is directed more toward awarding money to Indian people starting small businesses.

4. The following schools have formed a consortium providing post secondary education programs in the areas of general education, cultural arts, and occupational training: Haskell Indian Junior College, Institute of American Indian Arts (this may have changed due to the reorganization of IAIA and Albuquerque Indian School, Fall 1979), Southwestern Indian Polytechnic Institute, and Chilocco Indian School.

5. Indian Health Service offers training to Indian people in the following areas and positions: community health, dental assistant, nursing, environmental health, food service workers, lab assistant, x-ray technician, medical records secretary, and social work associate.

6. The Indian Law Program is offered by the University of New Mexico. This special scholarship program is for American Indian law students. Recipients may enroll at UNM or any accredited law school. The BIA assists with this program.

7. American Indian Scholarships, Inc., awards money to Indian graduate students, and it can be applied to costs incurred through attendance at any accredited graduate or professional school.

8. The University of California, Berkeley, offers a Master's degree in Public Health to Indian students. This program is also available at cooperating colleges.

9. Tribal grants, scholarships, and loans: individual tribes offer monies to tribal members for education, including vocational and professional training.

10. Indian Teacher Training Program: this program is offered at a number of colleges and universities.

11. There are other numerous college sponsored, federally sponsored, state sponsored and privately sponsored programs, loans, and scholarships available to Indian students and others (BIA, no date given, pp. 6-12).

Suggestions

In order for career counseling and training to be effective, it must be offered early, be realistic, and unbiased. Indian people have historically not been the recipients of this type of positive counseling and training. As seen in the previous section, this situation may be changing, although it remains that programs are only as good as the people running them. The following suggestions may provide some guidelines for existing and future vocational counseling and training personnel to consider when they interact with Indian students and help them plan their vocational programs:

1. Career education is not a cure-all. Tribal leaders, school personnel, and parents must insure that their schools provide education in the basic academic skills

and that at least functional literacy in these areas be required of students.

2. Indian education (including vocational training) needs to be culturally pluralistic. It is important that Indian students be allowed to develop the coping skills that may be necessary for them to effectively deal with the cultural, psychological, and behavioral changes they may experience in functioning in "mainstream America."

3. Reality learning should be one of the themes of elementary and secondary curriculum.

4. Career education can expand an Indian student's horizons. However, this expansion should not be achieved at the cost of that student's individual and cultural identity (Boudreaux, 1979, pp. 9-10).

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